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GANAPATI

BY

ETHEL THOMPSON

339

Koviloor Acadamy

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A R Subramanian

GANAPATI

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AN ADAPTATION

BY

ETHEL THOMPSON

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NOTE

This is an adaptation — not a translation — in English of the account in Tamil by Mr. P. M. Murugesa Mudaliar, which provides a running commentary on the English version and obviates the necessity for notes and other explanatory matter.

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Koviloor Acadamy

CONTENTS

Koviloor Acadamy



THE BIRTH OF GANAPATI

Koviloor Acadamy



GANAPATI

THE GODS AND THE DEMONS

There are many worlds. Some are above us, some are below us. The worlds above us we call the "upper regions." The worlds below us we call the "lower regions."

Brahma created all the worlds. In the upper regions he placed the gods, in the lower he placed the demons.

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Brahma created all the gods and all the demons. From the beginning the demons hated the gods, and were always at war with them. At last the gods could not fight any longer, so they prayed to Siva for help, for many days. He heard their prayers, and sent them many weapons to use against the demons. So the demons were defeated, and fled from the battle-field and hid themselves.

The Guru of the demons was Sukrachari. After their defeat the demons went to him, and sought his advice. "Tell us," they said, "how we may defeat our enemies."

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"Do not be afraid," said Sukrachari. "At the city of Kandaga rules king Chakrapani. He is king of the country of Maidala. By the grace of the Sun god a demon, Sindhu by name, will be born to him. He will defeat your enemies, and you will be happy again."



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KING CHAKRAPANI

King Chakrapani was a very good king, and ruled his kingdom justly. There was no king like him. But whenever the queen had a son, he always died. So the king and queen were very unhappy. They had given gifts to the poor. They had had sacrifices performed. But it was all in vain. Their prayers were not heard.

The king had two ministers. One day he handed over his kingdom to them, and went to the forest with the queen. Here, the king and queen thought, they could pray better than at their palace.

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One day a holy sage came to the forest. He was on a pilgrimage from one holy river to another. The king bowed before him, and told him his story. The sage said, "There was no need for you to come to the forest. If you perform the Sun sacrifice, you will have a son, and be happy. Return, and rule your kingdom." So saying, the sage taught the King how to perform the Sun sacrifice.

After this the king and queen returned to Kandaga.

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THE BIRTH OF SINDHU

When king Chakrapani reached Kandaga, he had the Sun sacrifice performed. The Sun god was pleased, and blessed the queen. Soon after her skin began to burn, and she did not know quite what to do.

Not far away flowed the Sindhu river. There were shady bowers on its banks, full of beautiful flowers. The queen went into one of the bowers, but could not get cool. So she smeared sandal mixed with rose-water all over her body. This gave her relief at last.

Some time afterwards the queen had a son. He was born

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on the banks of the Sindhu, and was a terrible child. He was born with a trident in one hand and a discus in the other, and his cry was like the roar of the waves. The queen's maids fled when they saw him, and the queen herself fainted.

Having stayed a few days with her son on the banks of the Sindhu, the queen returned with him to the palace. The king rejoiced when he saw his son, and gave gifts to the poor. As his son was born on the banks of the Sindhu, he named him Sindhu.

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SINDHU'S CHILDHOOD

As days passed, Sindhu grew very strong. He would leap from the ground into the sky, and seize the moon. He would take hold of Iravatha, Indra's white elephant, and hit it in the face. He would mount the beast, and travel from point to point of the compass. He would leap into the seas, and stir them up. He would chase the eight elephants at the cardinal points, and make them run. He would seize and shake the mountains till the earth shook again.

Sukrachari rejoiced. "The demons have nothing to fear now," he said.

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Then he called Sindhu to him, and taught him many prayers. "Pray to Siva," he said, "and he will bless you, and give you great gifts. Through you the whole family of the demons will grow great. You will rule as lord of the three worlds, before whom all will bow." So saying, he gave him his blessing, and sent him away.

When he was sixteen, Sindhu went into a forest, and sought Siva in prayer. Lord Siva was pleased, and gave him a boon. It was that he should rule the three worlds, and that even the gods should bow before him. "Only Ganesa can harm you," said the Lord of Kailas.

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Then Sindhu returned to the city of Kandaga. The king and queen were very glad to see him again, and gave many gifts to the people.

A few days afterwards Sindhu told his father of the gifts that Siva had given him. Then king Chakrapani, calling his ministers to him, handed over his kingdom to his son, amidst great rejoicing.

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SINDHU'S RULE

Sindhu did not remain long at Kandaga. He appointed two ministers to look after his kingdom, and led his armies forth to conquer the three worlds.

First he conquered the whole of the earth. Then calling together all the demons in it, he marched against the upper regions. There he fought against Indra, and defeated him. Thus he became lord of the upper regions.

After a few days, he placed two demons in charge of his new kingdom, and went down to the kingdom of the serpents. Here he made all the kings pay him homage, and he came back to his own kingdom on earth.

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So Kandaga became the capital of the three worlds, and Sindhu ruled there as king of kings. His throne was made of gold, studded with precious stones.

Indra, the king of the gods, now lay in prison. But one day he escaped in the form of a bee, and flew to Vaikuntam. Worshipping Vishnu, he told him of the defeat of the gods.

Vishnu at once collected his forces, and made war on Sindhu. But Sindhu fought bravely all day, and Vishnu admired his bravery, and said, "What boon can I give you, O, warrior ?"

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"Come to my city with your forces, great God," said Sindhu, "and protect me and my city."

Vishnu kept his word, and granted Sindhu his protection.

Alas! the sages could now no longer pray! So they went to Kailas to seek the aid of Siva. He appeared to them, and blessing them, said, "Soon Ganesa shall appear, and relieve all your sufferings. He shall slay Sindhu, and release the gods from prison."



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THE BIRTH OF GANAPATI

Spring came, and the cool breezes swept over the foot of the Kailas mountains. Here came Siva with Parvati.

One day they sat on a throne of crystal in a beautiful pavilion. Their eyes travelled along the walls of the pavilion, admiring the wonderful paintings on them. Among them was a picture of the beginning of things. As Siva and Parvati gazed on it, there was a sudden burst of light, like the light of many suns. In the midst of the blaze of light was the infant Ganesa.

The infant god came forth, and bowed to Siva and Parvati,

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his parents. His mother picked him up, and placed him on her lap. Then his parents gave him the name "Ganapati," which means "Lord of the heavenly armies."

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GANAPATI'S CHILDHOOD

Ganapati had the head of an elephant, with three eyes. He had four hands, and a white body. The sages loved him and praised him, for he had great daring. Their wives too loved him, for he was a happy little fellow, and would clap his hands and laugh and dance. His childish pranks greatly amused them. He would run up to them and sit on their laps, pull their hair down and run away. Then, if they chased him, he would get up a tree, and hide.

It was not long before Sindhu heard of him. "Is this Ganesa, of whom Siva spoke?" he asked himself. "If so, what shall I do?"

Then a voice came from the sky. "It is Ganesa," it said, "and he shall slay you."

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Sindhu flew into a rage, and jumping up said, "I will go and kill that infant."

Hearing him say this, one of his ministers came forward, and bowed and said, "My Lord, Brahma, Vishnu, and the other gods stand before you with bowed heads. Should such a mighty warrior as you are talk of this babe as your enemy? There are surely many demons waiting to be sent by you to kill the babe."

Sindhu, still in a rage, said, "Send the fiercest of our warriors to kill the elephant-headed babe at once."

So twelve of the most dreadful demons left the palace.

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GANAPATI'S DEEDS OF DARING.

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GANAPATI'S DEEDS OF DARING

[1]One demon took the form of a huge mango tree which seemed to reach to the sky. The branches were laden with fruit, and the sons of the sages sat under the tree and ate some of the fruit. They at once felt giddy, and fell back in a swoon.

But Ganapati was near. Crawling up to the tree, he entered a hole in the trunk. The trunk at once closed over him, but in a moment the tree swayed from side to side, and burst open. There, like the man-lion that appeared from the pillar, stood Ganapati.

A look from the eye in his forehead brought back to life the sons of the sages.

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Then with a loud crash the tree fell to the ground, and turned into the demon. Of course he was dead.

[2]The next day, as Ganapati sat on his mother's lap, a huge vulture swooped down, and carried him off. Ganapati was not afraid. With the strength of a young lion, he took hold of the vulture's neck, and broke it. Down, down the bird came to earth, where instead of the vulture a demon lay dead.

[3]At night someone came to rock Ganapati's cradle. The child kicked out with all his might, and killed another demon.

[4]A few days after this Ganapati was bathing in a tank with

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the sons of the sages. Suddenly a huge fish came along, and darting in and out among the boys, scattered them. When it came near Ganapati, he took hold of it by the tail, and dashed it to pieces on a stone. With a loud cry the demon in the fish died.

5 Now there was a demon who used to eat a hundred buffaloes a day. One day she took the form of a beautiful goddess, and came to nurse Ganapati. In a little while she was dead.

6 When Ganapati was five years old, he was going to the temple one morning with some other little boys. Suddenly a huge rock sprang up out of the ground,

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and blocked his way. Ganapati went on playing with his little friends, and backed into the rock. It split in two at once, and a demon lay dead in the dust.

[7]Days afterwards Ganapati was playing ball with the sons of the gods in a park. A demon got in amongst them, and began to play. Though he did not look like a demon, Ganapati knew that he was one, and threw the ball at him. It hit him on the head, and killed him.

[8]Then once again a demon took the form of a vulture, but a terrible one. It had eight legs and two heads, and its eyes glowed like fire. It had teeth too, and

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they grew bigger and bigger. As it flew through the air, the mountains rocked and the waves of the sea dashed against the shore with great fury.

When Ganapati saw it come, he seized it by the legs, and killed it.

[9]One day a man brought a pair of gold anklets to Parvati for Ganapati, and asked her to put them on him. Parvati did so, and Ganapati at once began to dance. He danced and danced, until everybody danced with him. When he came round to where the man was, he kicked out. Off flew both the anklets, and three demons lay dead upon the ground.

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The two anklets and the man were all demons.

[10]Shortly after this Ganapati was playing with the sons of the sages in a park. Seeing a big elephant coming towards them, the boys ran away in all directions. Ganapati just walked up to the elephant, and seizing it by the ear, he broke its tusks in two. Then he leapt on to its neck, and killed it. It rolled over on the grass, and that was the end of this demon, for the elephant was really a demon.

[11]Ganapati was playing in a garden with Parvati one day, when a huge snake came up to them. In a moment it had

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swallowed Ganapati. But before Parvati could do anything, Ganapati had ripped open the snake and come out, and was standing beside another dead demon.

The gods and the sages rejoiced and sang Ganapati's praises. Visvakarma, the artisan of the gods, made him a battle-axe and a spear out of the rays of the sun.



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WAR

"My Lord, bravest of warriors," said one of his ministers to Sindhu, "though young in years, Ganesa, the son of Siva, is great in war. He has destroyed all the warriors that have been sent against him. If he can do this as a child, will he not destroy us and our armies when he is older? Let us make peace with him."

Sindhu ground his teeth, and stamped on the earth till it shook again.

"Who are you to give me advice?" he shouted. "If you have no courage, go out of my sight." Then turning to one of

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his men, he said, "Demon of fire, go at once and call out all four divisions of our army. Wage war with that elephant-headed fellow, and see that you defeat him."

The gods trembled, and went to Kailas. "Great God," they cried to Siva, "Sindhu is sending the demon of fire with a large army against our Ganapati. Kill him and save us."

Siva graciously turned to Vinayaka, who was near, and said, "Go and defeat Sindhu, and return, wearing the garland of victory." So saying he gave him a trident.

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Parvati blessed her son, and said, "Slay Sindhu, and return victorious."

Ganapati, at the head of a large army, went to meet the demon of fire. There was a terrible battle, but though the demons fought well, in the end they had to give way. Seeing this, the demon of fire took up the terrible arrow of Siva, and hurled it at Ganapati. But he only laughed, and said, "Come, come" to it. The deadly arrow dropped into his quiver, without harming him. Ganapati then threw his trident at the demon. It buried itself in him, and in a moment he was a heap of ashes. After this the trident returned to Ganapati.

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Spies went to Kandaga, and told Sindhu of the defeat of his army. He at once got a still larger army together, and was going to lead it himself against Ganapati.

Meanwhile Ganapati called Nandi to him, and said, "Nandi, go to Sindhu to bring him to reason. If he will not release the gods from prison, tell him to come to battle."

With a deep bow Nandi went out.

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THE EMBASSY OF NANDI

In the palace of Kandaga there was a big hall. Here Sindhu saw anyone who wished to see him. When Nandi entered it, he saw Sindhu sitting on a wonderful throne. All around were demons with weapons in their hands.

On seeing him Sindhu called out, "Who is that there who dares to come in unbidden?"

Nandi replied, "Demon, I am the messenger of Ganapati, who has neither beginning nor end. They call me Nandi.

"Your prayers have brought you great boons. They have given you the strength to conquer and rule the three worlds. But with all your many blessings, you

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have forsaken the path of virtue. You have not ruled your subjects as if their lives were your own. You have treated them with great cruelty. Your ministers, who owe all to you, have not shown you the better way. They have let you go your own way.

"However, let what is past be past. Release now the gods and sages from prison. Rule justly, protect all. Make a proper use of the wealth that has been given you. This is the advice my Lord Ganapati has sent me to give you. If you will not heed it, then come forth to battle. But remember this. No one has lived who has gone to war with my Lord Ganapati."

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Sindhu listened a while, then shook with laughter. "Nandi," he said, "thank your little Ganapati for his advice, which is indeed beautiful. But the issue of battle no one can tell. Besides, you have been loud in your praise of a little fellow who cannot yet wield a sword. And who in all the world is able to conquer me? As for you, I have spared your life only because you are a messenger.

"But go now. Sindhu, the conqueror of the gods, is going forth to battle. Tell your baby Ganapati not to run away, but to get ready to meet me."

"Foolish fellow," replied Nandi, "I see your good sense has forsaken you. For were I not a

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messenger, you would now be dead. You are but chaff before me, and I could reduce you and your city to ashes. Remember, demon, that my Lord Vinayaka will destroy you and your Kingdom, and will protect the gods and the sages." Nandi was gone in a flash.

Then Sindhu girded on his sword of adamant over his armour, and got into his chariot, while the battle-drums beat. For miles around him spread his vast army, vast as the seven seas.

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THE SLAYING OF SINDHU

"My Lord Vinayaka," said Nandi on his return, "Sindhu is bent on war. He will not listen to reason, and has called out his whole army."

Ganapati only smiled and said, "See that our army besieges Sindhu before he has time to leave his fort."

"My Lord" said Nandi, "let me, I pray you, go first and scatter his army. Then you may come and slay him."

Ganapati agreed, and Nandi made way for sage Narada, who came with news of the strength of Sindhu's army and of his plan of attack.

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Nandi besieged Kandaga with a large army. He entered the fort by a small gate, and cut to pieces Sindhu's ministers and many demons.

Sindhu then, roaring like a lion, left the fort by another gate, bow in hand, and rode into the midst of Ganapati's army. Ganapati sent his club against him, and shattered his chariot, his bow, and his shield. Sindhu then jumped into another chariot, and, taking another bow, sent showers of arrows in all directions. Ganapati took five sharp arrows from his quiver, and with them shattered Sindhu's chariot, his standard, his horse, then his charioteer, and lastly his bow.

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Then Sindhu's army fled, and the demon stood before Ganapati defenceless.

If he had then asked for it, Ganapati would have granted him his protection. But he was mad with rage and blinded by his sins.

Near him on the ground lay a club of adamant. Picking it up, he threw it at Ganapati, with many taunts. Then Ganapati held up his trident, and sent it at the demon. The weapon flew through the air, and pierced the demon's heart.

As Sindhu lay dying, Ganapati stood beside him. A blinding light shone around, and Ganesa was

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there in his true form. So he blessed the dying demon.

Then the gods and the sages sang praises, as they showered flowers on Ganapati.



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THE ABODE OF JOY

After his victory Ganapati went to Mount Kailas. He bowed to Siva and Parvati, and the mother of all the worlds sat him on her lap and kissed him. Then he told his parents the story of his great victory, to their great joy.

"Bring forth," said Siva, "the bells of victory." And when they were brought, they were put on Ganapati's ankles. Once again the gods and the sages sang songs of praise, to the roll of the battle-drum.

After this the Lord of Kailas sent for Visvakarma, and told him to build a temple for Ganapati at the gate of his own temple.

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This the artisan of the gods did, and here Ganapati lived. This temple is called "The abode of Joy."



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THE COURT OF THE ELEPHANT-HEADED DEMON.

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WHY WE BOW THE KNEE TO GANAPATI

After their defeat the demons did not give up hope. They went again to their Guru, Sukrachari, for advice, which he gave them.

Not long afterwards there was born a demon who had the head of an elephant. He prayed hard to Siva, and obtained the boon of immortality from him. Soon he became a mighty warrior, and like Sindhu ruled the three worlds. The Gods trembled with fear before him, and did whatever he bade them do. Whenever they came before him, he made them hit themselves on the head three times, and with arms crossed over their bodies and hands grasping

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the lobes of their ears, he would make them bow three times to him.

When the gods could not stand his cruel treatment any longer, they went in a body to Siva for help. Having heard their complaint, Maha Deva said, "O Gods, do not be afraid. Our young warrior shall punish the demon."

Then Siva gave Ganapati the command of all the heavenly forces, and said, "May everyone praise you as lord. Whenever the gods, the sages and men have any ceremony to perform, let them first worship you and then perform it. Go now and punish the demon with the elephant's head."

The demon marched at the head of his army, carrying a great

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club. When Ganapati saw him, he shot several arrows into the air. They killed so many of the demons that the rest fled. But the leader came on, and began to fight fiercely. Knowing that he had obtained the boon of immortality, Ganapati broke off one of his tusks, and threw it at him. It pierced his heart, and he fell back, but immediately turned into a rat, and began to fight again. Taking pity on him, Ganapati caught hold of him, and, getting on to his back, made him his vahanam.

From that day his worshippers have given to Ganapati the homage which the gods gave to the elephant-headed demon.

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WHY WE OFFER GRASS TO GANAPATI

Once Yama, the god of death, had a son who was like fire. He was a terrible monster, and began to eat up the people on earth, and wanted to destroy the gods. So Indra worshipped Vinayaka, and he came to his aid. Changing the demon into a ball of fire, he swallowed him.

Now inside Ganapati are many worlds, and the fire caused great havoc among them. But the sages brought cool blades of grass, and laying them all over Ganapati, put out the fires within.

That is why we offer grass to Ganapati, and not sweet-scented flowers.

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WHY WE BREAK COCOANUTS BEFORE GANAPATI

Once Ganapati became a little boy, and lived in the hermitage of the Guru of the Rajah of Kasi.

One day the Rajah came to the hermitage, and asked his Guru to perform the young Prince's marriage.

"O King," said the Guru, "I have yet many prayers to say. But my son here will perform the happy ceremony. Take him with you."

So, the King took Ganapati with him. And when the people heard that he was returning to the city, they put festoons and

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garlands up everywhere, and welcomed him.

Along the streets full of happy people the King led the way to his Council Chamber. But as he and Ganapati were nearing it, a huge rock came up from the ground, and blocked the way.

Turning to the King, Ganapati said, " Have a hundred cocoanuts brought, O King, and let them be broken on the rock, one after another."

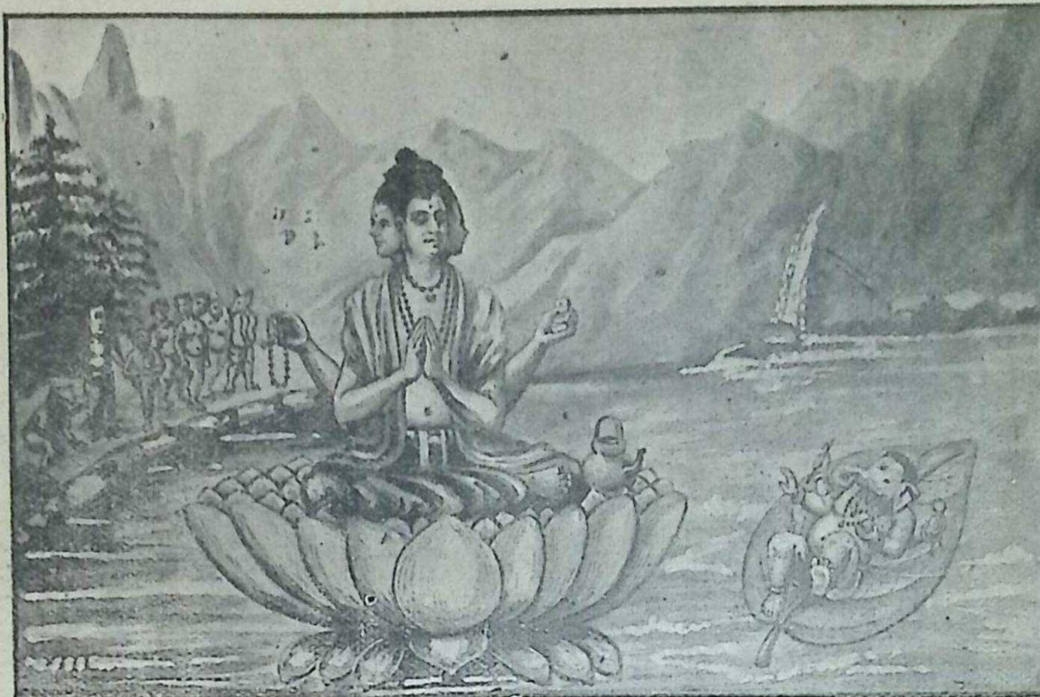
The King commanded his servants to do so, and they began to break the cocoanuts, when all of a sudden, instead of the dripping rock, the great body of a dying demon lay on the ground. The

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people fell back terrified, but Ganapati stared on the ground, and suddenly the earth opened, and swallowed up the body of the demon.

The gods and the sages now thronged around, and sang praises to Ganapati.

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HOW BRAHMA (BTAINED GANAPATI'S GRACE

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HOW BRAHMA OBTAINED GANAPATI'S GRACE

When Brahma first created men, they took all sorts of shapes. Some men had one head but two faces. Some had three eyes. Some again had four hands and five legs, and the hideous monsters would look at Brahma and laugh. Some would glare at him. Others would roll their eyes, and come up to him as if to hit him.

Brahma was greatly troubled in mind, and did not know what to do. Then he remembered that he had not worshipped Vinayaka before creating men. So, as he sat on his lotus throne, he prayed to the God of Grace, using many sentences from the Vedas. Then

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Ganapati, floating on a banyan leaf, came towards him as an infant.

With hands raised in prayer Brahma said, "Many and great have been my sorrows for not having worshipped thee before creating men. Forgive me my sin, and grant me grace to create men in the form I wish them to take."

Raising his hand in blessing, Ganapati said, "Recite, God of Creation, the one-letter prayer, and then begin anew the work of creation."

Brahma did so, and all went well.

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GANAPATI'S MARRIAGE

The first persons Brahma created were two beautiful maidens. "My dear daughters," he said to them, as they stood before him, "I wish to offer you in marriage to the God of Grace."

Then he created the seven sages, Janaka, Narada, and the others. As Narada stood before him he said, "Go to the Abode of Joy, and make known to Ganapati my wish that he should marry my daughters."

Narada did so, and Ganapati said, "Sage Narada, as desired by your father, Brahma, I accept in marriage the two maidens. Let preparations for our marriage be made."

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Narada returned to his father with the good news, and Brahma at once went to Kailas. Bowing to Siva and Parvati, he told them that Ganapati had consented to marry his daughters. They received the glad news with great joy.

Next Brahma asked Visvakarma to make a magnificent pavilion for the wedding. Then he invited Vishnu and all the other gods with all the sages to the wedding.

At the appointed hour, loaded with jewels, Ganapati came to Brahma's kingdom with Siva, Parvati, Skanda, Nandi, and Narada.

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With much ceremony, the mighty sage Janaka placed the boiling pot in the pavilion, and asked Ganapati and the maidens to sit near it. After this, as the other sages kindled the fire, he asked Ganapati and the maidens to walk round it. Then Brahma came forward and placed the hands of his daughters in Ganapati's hands, and while Sarasvati poured water, he gave the maidens in marriage to Ganapati. Now everyone sang praises, and Siva gave gifts to all.

After the wedding ceremony Siva accompanied his son and the two maidens to the Abode of Joy.

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THE FORM OF GANAPATI.

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THE FORM OF GANAPATI

Look at the picture on the opposite page. Here we see Ganapati sitting on his throne. He has a crown on his head, set with precious stones. There is a big stone in front, just above Ganapati's third eye, the " eye of grace."

Ganapati has four hands. They are the four cardinal points, and tell you that Ganapati is everywhere. In one hand he carries a small pot made of gold. It contains the oil with which he anoints his parents. In another hand we see the tusk which was broken off to protect the gods. Look at the other two hands. In one Ganapati holds the goad with which he drives away our

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sins, in the other the cord with which he binds us to him.

There are eight maidens standing around him and waiting on him. They are really powers for good. On the floor before him is the rat on which he rides.

Under many names—"the elephant-headed," "the five-handed," "the one-tusked," and so on—is Ganapati worshipped in India, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin.



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